

HOW TO...

Animate your friends

Put words into the mouths of your family and friends with the fun software on this month's cover DVD and the help of Xavier Cortez

CRAZYTALK MESSENGER



PCs excel in providing fun and affordable ways to get creative, and it doesn't come much more fun and affordable than CrazyTalk Messenger 4.6, which is included free on this month's cover DVD. This delightful software allows anyone to create surprisingly convincing – and often utterly hilarious – animations with nothing more than a digital photo and a microphone. The resulting video files can be emailed to unsuspecting friends and family, and even incorporated into more ambitious video-editing projects.

1 After installing the software and running it for the first time, you'll be greeted with a preset Model (face) and Script (voice recording). Press the Play button at the bottom-left to hear the Script and see the model's lips and expressions move in synchronisation. Try out a few of the supplied models and scripts by clicking the buttons at the top and double-clicking the templates on the right.

When you're ready to try one of your own photos, click the Model button at the top, followed by the Import Image button at the top of the column of buttons on the left. The software works best with photos of faces that are facing directly towards the camera and with a neutral expression and a closed mouth. A dialog box will appear, and the first task is to crop and rotate the photo. Rotate it if necessary using the buttons on the left, but don't worry too much about cropping, as you can also do this at the export stage. Click Next, then line the four dots up with the corners of the eyes and mouth. If you need to zoom in, use the + button in

conjunction with the hand tool to scroll around the image. Click Close when you're done.

2 Try your model by pressing the Play button at the bottom-right. It should already be pretty effective, but you might find that certain facial features aren't working quite as well as they could. Zoom in on the face if necessary and click the middle of the three buttons with an eye icon at the top-left. This shows a more detailed map of the various anchor points the software has identified, which you can move to give a better fit. If any of the details – particularly the mouth – are still a little off, click the right-most of the three buttons to enter a finer editing mode. Press Play at any time to see whether the animation quality is improving.

3 A toothless mouth can look pretty odd, so you need to add some false teeth to your model. Click the Advanced Facial Settings button at the bottom, followed by the Teeth tab. Pick one of the presets, and a pair of alarming-looking gnashers will appear in your model's mouth. Then use the Scale, Displacement and Color Settings sliders to make them look as natural as possible, but don't get your hopes up – they'll never look photorealistic. Click OK to close the dialog box and then click Add at the bottom-right of the screen to save your model into the Custom preset collection.

4 Click the Script button at the top followed by the red Record button towards the bottom to open the Sound Recorder dialog box. Plug in a microphone and use the sound card's

mixer utility to make sure it's selected as the recording input source. Back in CrazyTalk Messenger, hit Record and adjust the volume as you speak to get a healthy sound. You should be able to see the waveform appear, but if the top and bottom of the waveform are squared off, it's too loud and will be distorted. When the level is about right, click Stop followed by Record again to record your Script. When you're done, click Stop followed by OK. Click Add and type in a name to save your script.

5 The software analyses the script and applies a lip-sync animation automatically, but you can pick a style of delivery from the various Emotives at the bottom of the screen. Not all of them match their descriptions, but most are entertaining. If the one you prefer is a little too exaggerated, reduce the Mild-Intense slider on the right to tame it. These Emotives are part of the Script, so click the Update button if you want to save it for recall later on.

6 CrazyTalk Messenger has three export options: an .exe self-running file, a web object or a video file. The latter is best for sharing with others, as many computer users are likely to be suspicious of unknown .exe files or web plug-ins. Click the Media button at the top and choose WMV File in the drop-down Format list. In the lower drop-down list, select Local Area Network (768Kbps). You may also want to select the Crop button and adjust the blue rectangle to make the most of the available pixels. Click Export to save your video file to hard disk, ready to email to friends and family.

